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MARY McGRORY: Turner tackles the CIA with vigorous inhumanity

There is a school of thought which holds that the CIA got exactly what it deserved in Admiral Stansfield Turner, who has been its director for a year.

The Company recoiled at the thought of getting President Carter's first choice, Theodore Sorensen, and the appointment of what it considered a bleeding-heart liberal was turned back.

But Turner appears to be exactly what they say they are — hard-nosed technocrats, who do whatever dirty job comes to hand.

The admiral addressed himself to the overstaffing problem at the agency with the vigorous inhumanity that people who overthrew governments and plotted assassinations in the old days should admire — but don't.

Eight hundred and twenty veteran spooks were sent out into the cold, without even the ritual expressions of regret and thanks. The chilling terms in which the admiral justified the action proves he is one of them.

"They were excess people," he told a reporters' breakfast the other day. "They sat there and clogged the system."

That may be the military mind at work, but clearly out of sync with an administration led by a Baptist who professes to love all.

The outraged CIA officers, although trained in silence, have gone to the press with their laments.

"Most reprehensible," the admiral said brusquely. "They are violating the tenets of their profession. They are trying to reverse my policies or throw me out."

He is not, however, worried that they are going to write books. They are doing something that he deplores almost as much — "trying to make themselves the center of the stage."

For the agency defectors who write their memoirs and tell secrets, he has the utmost contempt. Frank Snepp, who has detailed in the secretly published *Decent Interval* the CIA's inadvertent betrayal of its Vietnamese agents in the flight from Saigon, particularly rankles.

"Snepp came to me as a gentleman and told me I could go over the book."

He gave this ultimate icy judgement. "He is not an honorable man." He said that Snepp gave agents' names, which is not so.

Some liberals are worried that the howls of the dismissed old boys are drowning out the question about continuing covert operations, which will be carried out in the same old way by younger people. The president admitted that covert activities go on, although under new strictures.

The admiral would not say how many had been carried out during his first stormy year on the bridge. But he thinks the new charter which forbids the CIA to spy at home and the FBI to sleuth abroad will work well, particularly since the new nominee for FBI director, Judge William Webster, is "someone I have known in the past." They were Amherst College classmates back in the '40s.

The embattled admiral has an unexpected defender in one of the CIA's bitterest critics, Morton Halperin, the former Kissinger aide who sued Kissinger and Nixon for tapping his telephone.

"I think he could be worse," says Halperin. "For an admiral, he is reasonably interested in analysis, more than in operations. I think the impetus for covert activities would come from career officials in the agency and the National Security Council rather than from him."

This faint praise illustrates Turner's dilemma. The old hands complain that the admiral puts more faith in machines which track satellites than in "humints," the Company's term for "human agents," who try to find out what our enemies are thinking — and who apparently, to the skipper's way of thinking, merely "clog the system."

For those who worry that the CIA is incorrigible and that the admiral is better suited to the job he denies he aspires to — chairmanship of the joint chiefs — the good news is that Frank Carlucci, ambassador to Portugal, is coming aboard as deputy director.

Carlucci is something of a hero to anti-CIA elements, because during his tenure in Portugal, at the supremely delicate moment of Portugal's first election in 50 years, he refused to employ the bad offices of the CIA.

According to T.D. Allman, who wrote a brilliant piece for the November Harper's magazine on the subject, Carlucci defied an indignant Henry Kissinger, warning him that if the U.S. meddled, "NATO soon would have its first Communist member."

For this insubordination, Kissinger tried to fire Carlucci — as he had fired his equally heretical predecessor, Stuart Scott. But Carlucci's college roommate, Don Rumsfeld, saved his job, and Carlucci refused to lift a finger. Portugal was saved for a Socialist government and democracy.

Carlucci is, in fact, just what the CIA needs — someone who knows the negative consequences of covert actions — and has a proven record of resistance. He understands something that the Company has never grasped — the value of doing nothing sometimes.